



First-Time Pass Rate Improvement Plan

**College of Law
Juris Doctor Program**

**Submitted to the
State University System of Florida
September 2, 2020**

**Pending Approval by the
FAMU Board of Trustees**

Professional Licensure & Certification Exam First-time Pass Rate Improvement Plan FAMU College of Law Juris Doctor (JD) Program

Executive Summary

The Florida A&M University (FAMU) College of Law offers the Juris Doctor (JD) degree and is accredited by the American Bar Association. The College is pursuing a data-driven comprehensive strategy to improve its bar passage rates. The strategy includes supporting our current students to success, including through the assessment and revision of our curriculum in line with other State University System schools with higher bar passage rates. Beginning with the admissions process, the College has a robust system for monitoring the progression of its students through the program. The College is also focusing on recruiting and retaining students that our data analysis suggests will be successful on the bar exam and in obtaining professional positions after graduation.

For our students who will be taking the bar exam most immediately, the College provides (1) access to third-party products to supplement their commercial bar preparation courses; and (2) an in-house support, accountability and supplemental program intended to enhance bar study (the “BEST Program”). These resources are available to repeat takers. Students do not typically delay taking the bar exam with over 90% in the last three cohorts (May, August, and December 2019) taking the bar at the first opportunity. In the last three cohorts, 66.4% of those who took the bar passed the exam on their first or second attempt. Most students who do not pass the bar on the first attempt nonetheless acquire professional positions within ten months of graduation.

In terms of currently enrolled students, the College recently revised its curriculum to better align with other Florida schools that are more successful on the bar and emphasize early skill mastery. The revised curriculum is in effect for the fall 2020 entering cohort. The College monitors the academic progression of its students starting with the decision to admit a student whose credentials signal they may find law school particularly challenging. These students are invited to participate in the Summer Comprehensive Academic Legal Enhancement program (SCALE). SCALE focuses on enhancing participants’ problem solving, legal reasoning, and essential reading and thinking skills in a law school setting. The College continues to track its students’ progression through: (1) probation (students with GPAs below 2.0 at the end of any semester), (2) academic alert (students with GPAs between 2.0 and 2.4 at the end of any semester), and (3) an Upper Level Diagnostic exam (administered to all students upon completion of their foundational curriculum). These tracking mechanisms allow for identification of those students who require additional intervention. The College currently provides these students with additional support and advising through its Academic Success and Bar Preparation Program (ASBP) and its Academic Planning for Success Advisor (Advisor).

In terms of recruitment, the College made the strategic decision to admit a much smaller entering cohort for the fall of 2020 (115 matriculated students v. 212 in the fall of 2019). This decision was made to (1) maximize the quality of the cohort in terms of incoming credentials (moving our median LSAT score from 146 to 147 and our median UGPA from a 3.09 to a 3.29); and (2) enhance the efficacy of the use of our faculty resources to support these students to success.

Finally, the College remains fully accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) although the ABA has determined that the College is not in compliance with Standard 316 which requires an ultimate bar passage rate of 75%. The College has and continues to engage the expertise of other schools in the State University System and external consultants with specialized knowledge and experience.

Exam Pass Rates

1. Describe the short-term strategies to improve the passage rates for recently graduated and currently enrolled students expected to take the exam in the short-term.

The FAMU College of Law (COL) employs several strategies to improve pass rates for recently graduated and currently enrolled students expected to take the bar in the short term. *Campaign One and Done* provides access to review resources provided by third-party vendors, AdaptiBar and Kaplan, at no charge to the students and graduates. The AdaptiBar resources include an online Multistate Bar Exam (MBE) simulator with licensed MBE questions, simulated questions, and individual progress tracking to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses. Students may access these resources throughout bar preparation, including prior to graduation. The Kaplan resources include a seven-day course at the start of bar review with daily quizzes for MBE subjects, on-demand substantive review lectures and a three-day course closer to the bar exam with a full-day simulated MBE and two days of question-based review. During their final year of study students also have access to 3L Mastery Outlines and online questions from Barbri. Faculty are encouraged to assign the Barbri resources in their classes.

The BEST Program consists of the Academic Success and Bar Preparation Program (ASBP) team, which is responsible for: (1) making sure all students have access to the referenced resources, (2) assisting students in developing study plans, (3) monitoring resource usage, and (4) providing reminders and incentives for use. The BEST Program also includes workshops on essay writing and multiple-choice strategies developed by ASBP. ASBP plans to enhance these offerings in collaboration with the Legal Research & Writing (LRW) Department. Finally, the BEST Program includes subject-specific workshops developed in coordination with doctrinal faculty that cover each bar subject, including Florida distinctions. These are available live or as asynchronous recordings.

2. Describe the short-term strategies to assist students who recently failed the exam. Does the institution provide additional tutoring or financial assistance to students who fail the exam?

The BEST Program, described above, remains available to graduates who have taken and failed a bar exam. Through *Campaign #RaiseTheBar*, repeat takers receive access to the AdaptiBar and Kaplan resources described above. The College provides these resources at no charge; however, for AdaptiBar, graduates are only permitted two subscriptions at no charge. The College also advises repeat takers to utilize a commercial bar preparation program. The ASBP faculty encourage repeat takers to provide copies of their prior exam scores and essays which are used to assess the bar taker's strengths and weaknesses in order to assist in developing an effective study plan.

3. Provide the overall pass rate for the last three cohorts of graduates, including information on students who retake the exam. How many students pass the exam on the 2nd attempt, 3rd attempt, etc.? How many students fail the exam twice?

Data on first-time Bar pass rates for the past three years is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. First-Time Pass Bar Rates

Year	Pass Rates	Number of Examinees
2019	57%	94
2018	47%	107
2017	50%	117

The last two cohorts of graduates (May and August 2020) have not yet had an opportunity to take the Florida Bar Exam, because administration of the exam has been delayed. Therefore, this information is based on the most recent three cohorts of graduates who have had an opportunity to take the Florida Bar Exam: students who graduated in May, August, and December 2019.

Among the 114 graduates in this group about whom we have bar exam information, a total of 76 have passed the bar exam, an overall pass rate of 66.7%. Of those, 68 (59.6% of the cohort) passed on the first attempt with 8 passing on the second attempt. To date, 2019 graduates have not yet had an opportunity to take the bar exam a third time. Among 2018 graduates, 8 (10.6% of the 2018 graduates about whom we have bar exam information) passed the bar exam on their third attempt. Of the 38 students who have not passed the bar exam, 12 students have tried and failed twice. The other 26 have only taken the exam once.

4. How long after graduation do students typically wait to take the exam? How many students delay taking the exam beyond a normal or typical period and why? What assistance is available to student who students who delay?

Most 2019 graduates did not wait to take the bar exam. Among the 113 graduates about whom we have exam information, 105 (92.9%) took the exam at the earliest opportunity. The remaining students took the bar exam at their second opportunity.

Students who delay taking the bar exam do so for a variety of reasons. Most students who delay feel that they are not prepared for the exam and do not want to fail. If warranted, ASBP faculty will advise students to delay if they do not seem to be sufficiently prepared. Some other students want to take a break from studying after completing law school. A small number of students feel that they do not have sufficient time to study due to work obligations or do not have the money to pay the bar application fees.

Students who delay taking the bar exam have the same access to the BEST program and the *Campaign One and Done* resources noted above, all provided at no cost to the applicant.

5. Are students required to pay for any services or other support strategies provided?

Students do not pay the College for any of the services or support strategies it provides.¹ Most students do purchase a bar preparation resource from a third-party vendor such as Kaplan, Barbri, or Themis.

6. Provide any available information on the employment outcomes of students who do not pass the exam. Do those students find employment, and if yes, what types of jobs?

The Office of Career Planning & Professional Development (“CPPD”) collects employment data on recent graduates. To answer this question, CCPD utilized the ABA 10-month employment data for May 2019 and August 2019 which was reported on March 16, 2020 (survey date). For the December 2019 graduates, the employment data has not yet been collected.² To provide preliminary data for that cohort, CCPD utilized publicly available information and information previously collected from graduates.

May 2019: Of the 100 graduates in this cohort, 32 did not pass on the first attempt. Of those 32:

- 23 were employed by the survey date. Since then, we learned that 3 graduates are now likely employed (they were previously seeking employment).
 - 9 graduates were in Bar Passage Required Positions.
 - 6 graduates were in Bar Passage Required positions by the survey date.

¹ Third-party resources contracted for by the College are provided at no cost to the students for at least two subscriptions.

² The ABA requires reporting of this data ten months after graduation, i.e., by March 15 each year. As such, the process of data collection for December 2019, May 2020, and August 2020 graduates has not yet begun.

- 3 graduates got Bar Passage Required Positions after later passing the bar. They were previously classified as seeking employment.
 - 8 graduates obtained JD Advantage positions (2 in Law Firms, 4 in Business & Industry, 2 in Government).
 - 4 graduates were in Professional Positions (not otherwise classified as JD Advantage)
 - 2 graduates were in Non-professional positions.
- 2 graduates did not report their employment status and the CPPD was unable to locate their employment using methods permissible under the ABA Employment Protocols.
- 1 grad was not seeking work.
- 1 was pursuing another graduate degree.
- 5 of these graduates were still seeking work.

In this class, there were an additional 17 whose bar passage status was unknown. Their employment outcomes are as follows:

- 4 of these graduates were unknown
- 10 graduates are employed
 - 1 grad is in a Bar Admission required position. He passed the NC bar
 - 5 graduates were in JD Advantage Positions
 - 3 graduates were in Professional Positions
 - 1 grad is likely in a Non-Professional Position, as a bartender.
- 1 was pursuing a graduate degree
- 2 were seeking work

August 2019: There were 9 graduates in this cohort. 4 of them did not pass the bar exam on the first attempt.

- 3 of the 4 graduates were employed by the survey date
 - 1 grad was Bar Passage Required in Public Interest
 - 2 graduates were in Professional Positions in Education (1 of these graduates was working in the FAMU Law Library).
- 1 was seeking employment.

There were 3 graduates whose bar passage status was unknown. All 3 were employed.

- 2 in JD Advantage Positions (1 in Government and the other at a law firm)
- 1 in a Professional Position.

December 2019: There are 38 graduates in this cohort. The CPPD has not yet begun the official ABA employment data collection process for this class. CPPD has provided some preliminary, unverified, employment data for the December 2019 graduates who have not passed the bar exam, and the graduates whose bar status is unknown. We used information CPPD collected around graduation and from internet searches for these graduates. Of the 38 graduates, 11 did not pass the bar exam.

- We suspect that 7 of them are likely working in some capacity. Without the official survey, it is hard to classify the subcategories for these jobs.

There are an additional 10 graduates whose bar passage status we do not know.

- CPPD identified 6 as possibly having jobs.
- 1 grad from this group has let the CPPD know that the grad is not seeking work.
- 3 graduates the CPPD cannot find any information on at this time.

Admissions

This section should address the admissions criteria and the extent to which they may or may not be sufficient for admitting qualified students to the program.

As is the case at most law schools, the law school admissions committee takes a holistic approach considering a number of factors which include, but are not limited to, LSAT score(s), undergraduate GPA (UGPA), undergraduate major, undergraduate school, undergraduate coursework, reference letters, character and fitness, personal statement, and information regarding previous law school attendance. An applicant must receive a majority of the relevant votes in order for the committee to recommend admission. In 2019, the College commissioned an in-depth, longitudinal study of the correlation between incoming credentials, among other factors, and outcomes. The study demonstrated a strong correlation between UGPA and bar success for FAMU's students. As a result of that study, the College made the strategic decision to admit a smaller cohort of students in the fall 2020 entering class. Specifically, while the entering class in fall 2019 was 212 students, the entering class in fall 2020 was 115 students. The 2020 cohort's median UGPA also increased from a 3.09 in the fall of 2019 to a 3.29 in the fall of 2020.

The Associate Dean for Student Learning and Assessment, in collaboration with the University's Office of Institutional Research, has recently undertaken to build a comprehensive profile of the successful FAMU law student, defined as the student who takes and passes a bar exam on the first attempt. We plan to use this profile to guide our admissions strategy and decisions.

Curriculum

This section should describe any recent or planned curriculum reviews relative to its alignment with the content on the exam. Please note the date of the review and key changes to be made in the short-term and in the long-term.

The faculty undertook a multi-year review focused on (1) aligning the curriculum with other Florida schools that have higher bar passage rates; and (2) emphasizing skills in the foundational curriculum. This review resulted in significant revisions to the foundational curriculum. The faculty approved the revised curriculum in spring of 2020 for students entering in fall 2020.

Under the revised curriculum, students will now earn credit for Introduction to Analytical Skills (IAS) I and II, which had been non-credit courses. IAS I teaches students critical analytical skills for success in law school, the bar exam, and in law practice including critical reading, writing, and thinking, and problem solving; time management, class preparation, and exam preparation. In IAS II, students build on the skills learned in IAS I, continuing to apply those skills to essay and multiple-choice exercises. In addition, students learn to evaluate their past exam performance, determine their strengths and weaknesses, and develop effective study plans to maximize improvement. With the addition of academic credit, the College expects student engagement in and time devoted to learning the skills taught in IAS to increase. In addition, one credit hour was added to the Legal Research and Writing Course in order to better reflect the amount of time students were expected to spend working on their research and writing skills. These changes in the skills curriculum are expected to provide students with a firmer foundation in these important fundamental skills which will serve them throughout their legal studies.

In addition, the decision was also made to align the curriculum at the College with other Florida law schools. These changes included moving from two semester to one semester courses for Property,

Contracts, Torts and Civil Procedure and reducing the credit hours associated with each now carrying four credits when they previously carried five (Property and Torts) or six (Contracts and Civil Procedure). The foundational curriculum for fall 2020 entering students is as follows:

FULL-TIME FOUNDATIONAL CURRICULUM

First Year - Fall	
Courses	Credit Hours
Civil Procedure	4
Criminal Law	3
Introduction to Analytical Skills I	1
Legal Research and Writing I	3
Torts	4

Total Credits	15
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First Year - Spring	
Courses	Credit Hours
Contracts	4
Introduction to Analytical Skills II	1
Legal Research and Writing II	3
Property	4
Constitutional Law I	3

Total Credits	15
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PART-TIME FOUNDATIONAL CURRICULUM

Fall Semester	
Courses	Credit Hours
Contracts	4
Introduction to Analytical Skills I	1
Legal Research and Writing I	3

Total Credits	8
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Spring Semester	
Courses	Credit Hours
Civil Procedure	4
Criminal Law	3
Introduction to Analytical Skills II	1
Legal Research and Writing II	3

Total Credits	11
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Changes to the Upper Division Curriculum

In the 2020-2021 academic year, the Curriculum Committee will continue the curriculum review, recommending additional upper division courses to supplement and provide additional depth to the coverage of the foundational subjects. The Committee expects to recommend upper-level courses in Torts, Civil Procedure, Contracts, and Property.

Advanced Analytical Skills

Advanced Analytical Skills I and II (AAS) are offered in the fall and spring semesters, respectively. Students in the academic alert status (2.0-2.4 GPA) are encouraged, but not required, to attend AAS sessions. AAS is mandatory for students on probation (under 2.0 GPA). Other students may attend voluntarily. Students attending voluntarily tend to attend specific sessions rather than the entire course.

In late July, Dean Keller and Interim Associate Dean Cooper met with the ASBP faculty to initiate a process for reviewing and revamping AAS. In the near term, the process includes converting modules of the existing course to asynchronous learning supplemented by synchronous AAS meetings. The addition of asynchronous modules is intended to alleviate the logistical challenges of finding a time in the schedule that works with the class schedules of all students required or encouraged to attend. The ASBP faculty will complete the updating of AAS in fall 2020. Changes in AAS will take effect for spring 2021.

Student Progression

This section should describe how student progression and performance is monitored throughout the program and what strategies are in place to support students who may need additional assistance. Also include the extent to which predictive analytics is part of monitoring efforts.

The College monitors its students' progression and performance beginning with the decision to admit a student whose credentials signal they may find law school particularly challenging. The College invites all admitted students whose LSAT score is below 146 to participate in the SCALE program. During SCALE, students are introduced to legal doctrine, attend writing labs, and participate in critical and analytical skills workshops. Critical Reading, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving labs were added to the SCALE Program to assess problem-solving and critical reading skills. In 2019, the program was enhanced with additional in-class assessments, as well as enrichment activities, such as discussion sessions with attorneys and members of the local judiciary.

Once enrolled, any student with a GPA below a 2.0 at the end of any semester is on academic probation, while students between a 2.0 and 2.4 are on academic alert. Students on academic probation must attend the (AAS) course, have mandatory meetings with the ASBP faculty and the College's Academic Planning for Success Advisor (Advisor). Each student is assigned an ASBP professor to work with one-on-one to assess their prior performance, strengths and weaknesses, plan for improvement, and learn needed skills. The student's mandatory meeting with the Advisor takes place following completion of four mandatory meetings with the assigned ASBP faculty member. Depending on the needs of the individual student, the Advisor may assist in the development of study and time management plans and review academic standards requirements outlined in the Student Handbook.

ASBP retains documents that confirm completion of all assignments listed in the Probation Phases Schedule of Assignments. Each term, the Advisor reviews the status of probation students to determine which students move from probation to academic alert status.

Students whose cumulative GPA falls within the range of 2.0 to 2.4 receive an alert notifying them of the need for academic assistance. In the notice, students are encouraged to meet with ASBP to develop an improvement plan. The Advisor also contacts students on academic alert, encouraging them to meet with her. The academic alert notice is advisory, imposing no additional requirements on students.

In addition, all students at the College are administered the Upper-Level Diagnostic Exam (Diagnostic). Because the bar exam is based primarily on the subject matter covered in the foundational curriculum, the Diagnostic is administered in the second year for full-time student and the third-year for part-time students, i.e., after completion of the foundational curriculum. The Diagnostic is designed to provide students with an individualized assessment tool and corresponding feedback.

The Diagnostic is a three-hour exam with 120 questions testing four distinct areas: Knowledge, Comprehension, Analysis, and Application. Each question is tagged to both a substantive and skills taxonomy that identifies students at risk of failing the bar exam.

Upon completion of the Diagnostic, students receive an individualized report identifying strengths and weaknesses in skills and knowledge. Barbri hosts the Systematic Problem Solving and Diagnostic Deconstruction workshop in which the instructor provides students with specific problem-solving strategies to improve their knowledge and skills and tips and strategies for enhancing performance on the bar exam. Barbri also shares the cohort results with the faculty and facilitates a discussion regarding the results. The College plans to make more robust use of the data resulting from the Diagnostic, including as a tool for enhanced student advising.

Faculty Support & Development

This section should describe what support and development are available to the faculty to ensure they are able to adequately support students in preparing for the exam.

The faculty has been provided with a number of resources which they can utilize in their courses to increase formative assessment, including quizzes, and to deploy active learning strategies. These materials have been acquired from third party vendors with expertise in bar preparation and include content keyed to the content on both parts of the Florida bar exam. The College has also engaged Barbri to provide faculty development on the effective use of these resources.

Another resource that has been provided to faculty is Student Assistants. Currently, Student Assistants are funded for both the LRW and ASBP programs through Title III. The ASBP Student Assistants will conduct weekly essay and multiple-choice question review sessions, track charts for bar takers, consult with students during weekly office hours, and provide feedback on essays. As such, they will be a resource for both the ASBP faculty and the students. The LRW Assistants work under the direction of the LRW Director and faculty. They will conduct workshops, in conjunction with faculty, designed to review fundamental writing and citation skills, improve critical thinking, enhance legal reasoning, and develop research skills. The LRW Student Assistants are attending LRW classes weekly to review the material covered and the method of delivery. This understanding better equips them to address student questions. The LRW Student Assistants are holding office hours and meeting individually with students who need additional help understanding material covered in class and are working to provide helpful resources to students including handouts covering key phrases and terms used in class. Finally, the LRW Student Assistants will review student writing assignment drafts and suggest improvements. They also provide valuable emotional support to students through this difficult time.

In addition to these funded Assistantships, in February 2020, the faculty approved new courses providing for faculty-supervised Law Teaching Fellow (TF) positions and, while we await final approval in the State course approval system, faculty are eager to work with TFs beginning in spring 2021. The positions are primarily intended as learning experiences and are available during the second and third year under the supervision of full-time faculty members. TFs must have successfully completed the course for which they are applying and must receive written permission of the professor whom they would assist. TFs will assist the faculty member in conducting multiple evaluations during the term and in providing regular feedback. TFs are required to attend classes and complete all course reading assignments. In addition, TFs will (1) undertake at least two meaningful teaching experiences (e.g. conducting review sessions), (2) devote at least 30 hours during the course to holding student meetings, and (3) attend tutorial sessions with the professors who will provide feedback on the student's work. All information provided at the review and study sessions must be approved in advance by the professor. TFs will gain experience that will enhance their analytical and communication skills. They also will deepen their understanding of the area of law while assisting faculty in providing additional formative assessment, feedback, and support.

While the College has provided intermittent opportunities for faculty development which are detailed below, it is recognized that a more comprehensive approach to faculty development, focused specifically on best practices in pedagogy for institutions serving similarly credentialed student bodies to ours is needed. The new Dean and the University are in the process of developing a program of faculty development with the stated focus.

The relevant faculty development initiatives which have taken place recently at the College include a workshop conducted in November 2019 by Laurie Zimet who discussed teaching methods, strategies, and student learning in the context of improving bar passage rates. In addition, during the spring of 2020, Michael Sims of Barbri presented the results of the longitudinal study the College had commissioned. Finally, the adoption of Canvas and Canvas training is playing a significant faculty development role. By leveraging the learning tools available in the Canvas platform, faculty can enhance their ability to support student learning, not only in bar subjects, but across the curriculum.

Accreditation

This section should address any recent decisions, findings, actions from the program’s accreditor and/or licensing board and how the institution is addressing those issues.

The College of Law underwent sabbatical review in 2019. The ABA ultimately concluded that the College was in compliance with all standards. In a separate annual review, the ABA concluded that the college had not demonstrated compliance with Standard 316 which requires that “at least 75 percent of a law school’s graduates in a calendar year who sat for a bar examination must have passed a bar examination administered within two years of their date of graduation.” The College’s rate of passage for graduates in calendar year 2017 was reported at 70.83%. The College must submit a report by February 2021 demonstrating compliance with the Standard.

External Assistance

This section should describe any efforts to reach out to other institutions (SUS and non-SUS) with strong pass rates to identify best practices and obtain additional guidance and support.

In 2019, the former Interim Dean consulted with Florida International University regarding guidance and best practices. As a result of that contact the College engaged bar expert Johnathan Grossman who provided a three-day workshop for FAMU Law graduates intended to optimize bar study. The College has also engaged or is engaging external consultants to help the College improve its bar passage. In 2017, the College engaged Lindsay Gustafson to review its LRW program. Gustafson recommended that the College make significant programmatic and course level changes. Many of the course level changes were implemented and the programmatic changes are dependent upon hiring a full-time permanent director which the College has not had since. The College plans to hire a permanent director to be in place by fall 2021.

In November 2019, the College hired Professor Laurie Zimet, a recognized expert in academic support, to assess the College’s academic success measures and suggest improvements to increase the bar passage rate. Professor Zimet provided several specific recommendations which the College adopted. For example, the College now offers Academic Support classes for credit.

In the 2019-2020 academic year, the College commissioned Barbri to conduct the longitudinal study mentioned previously. The results included the insights which altered the College’s admissions strategy for the fall 2020 cohort. In addition, the Barbri study clarified the cohort of students at the College who need additional support by identifying the correlation between GPA at the end of the first year of study and propensity for bar pass success. In light of that data, the new Dean has charged the Director of ASBP with surveying models for support utilized by other similarly situated Colleges of Law and presenting his findings for the faculty to consider which model is best suited to the College’s needs.

Finally, the College is in the process of engaging Barry Currier who was, until recently, the Managing Director of the ABA’s Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. The College has requested that Mr. Currier conduct a comprehensive review of the College’s academic and non-academic functions to identify areas of strength for further development and areas of weakness which would require retooling, reinvigorating, or reimagining. Most immediately, this analysis will be deployed to address the College’s bar passage challenges.

Additional Information (optional)

This section is optional and may be used to describe any other initiatives designed to improve exam pass rates that do not align with any of the previous sections.

N/A